

Private arms dealers: legal—and illegal

Not all arms deals are between governments of nations. There are also private peddlers — both the legal (and sometimes large) traders and the illegal gunrunning variety. For a look at both the sunny and shady sides of private arms sales, read this fifth story in a series about who arms the world.

By John K. Cooley

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LAST MONTH'S SOVIET-AMERICAN strategic arms limitation (SALT) treaty is viewed by many people and governments as a giant stride toward disarmament.

It has not, however, bothered the private arms traders. Quite the contrary.

Samuel Cummings, the 44-year-old American who heads Interarms — by far the world's largest private buyer and seller of arms — points out: "We don't worry about the SALT agreement because it will have no effect whatsoever on the movement of conventional arms, the arms we deal in."

"If anything, I would venture a modest prediction that it will cause an increase in conventional arms movement in the world, not only by private firms and producers, but also by governments."

"The inevitable result of denying or limiting strategic arms, the balance-of-power arms, is a greater movement of the conventional types."

"Anyhow, our business isn't controlled by us. It's controlled by the big powers who give the licensing."

"And we are merely, in my view, a reflection for better or for worse of the times in which we live... The whole arms business... is essentially based on human folly and as such is self-perpetuating. It increases in direct proportion to human folly as the world's population increases."

Licensed arms dealer

"It's a sad commentary, and I don't make it in any hypocritical sense but strictly in a brutally realistic and, from our side, commercial sense."

Mr. Cummings spoke in a telephone interview from his residence in Monaco. From there, he controls International Arms Corporation in the U.S., with main offices and warehouses in Alexandria, Va., and a staff of about

London 40; and Interarms U.K. in Britain, with a staff of 100, and warehouses in Manchester and Acton outside London.

Mr. Cummings, who comes from Philadelphia, began his present career after his World War II Army service by buying up captured German helmets and reselling them at a profit. Since 1953 he has been registered with the U.S. Government as a licensed arms dealer.

Essentially, Interarms' work is to buy up surplus military arms and resell them, either as sport weapons — after "sporterizing" or converting them — or to other governments. The sale to other governments has included everything from surplus uniforms to heavy tanks and jet combat planes. It is shrouded in secrecy because, says Mr. Cummings, "our clients prefer not to have publicity, and governments keep the figures classified anyway."

Turnover top secret

Mr. Cummings says Interarms' turnover is "top secret" too, but adds that "while we have been aiming for \$100 million yearly, it is still in eight figures only, not nine."

Mr. Cummings has taken legal proceedings against some who called him a "trafficker." That, "by European definition," he says, "is someone who does not pay any attention to the law... We are buyers and sellers under American and British Government licenses; we have only those depots physically in England and America, and every transaction is made only with the proper official approval by all governments concerned."

Clients of Interarms are found on every continent. Its Middle East business is so sensitive that even the names of its Midcast agents are kept secret.

Under the U.S. Gun Control Act of 1968, Interarms and other traders cannot import even sporterized ex-military guns into the United States. This has vastly helped U.S. gun manu-